What Is Claimed Is:

1. A license-issuing method for issuing an electronic license for certifying that usage of digital contents is permitted to a specific user, the method comprising:

generating information for verification required to verify legitimacy of an electronic license;

inputting information to specify the information for verification;

generating the electronic license which can be verified by the information for verification specified by the input information to specify the information for verification; and

outputting the generated electronic license.

2. A license-issuing system which issues an electronic license for certifying that usage of digital contents is permitted to a specific user, the system comprising:

verification information generation means for generating information for verification required to verify legitimacy of an electronic license;

verification information output means for outputting the information for verification generated by the verification information generation means;

license generation means which receives information to specify information for verification and generates the electronic license that can be verified by the information for verification specified by the received information; and

license output means for outputting the electronic license generated by the license generation means.

3. A license-issuing system according to Claim 2, further comprising:

usage condition generation means for generating a usage condition which is a condition for limiting usage of digital contents, wherein:

the usage condition generated by the usage condition generation means is included in the electronic license generated by the license generation means.

4. A license-issuing system according to Claim 2, wherein:

information to specify an intermediator of the issuance of the electronic license and an agreement for certifying that the intermediation of the issuance of the electronic license corresponding to the specified information for verification is allowed to the specified intermediator are input to the license generation means together with the information to specify information for verification; and

it is checked by the agreement whether or not the intermediation of the issuance of the electronic license corresponding to the information for verification is allowed to the intermediator and only in the case the intermediation is allowed, the electronic license is generated.

5. A license-issuing system according to Claim 2, further comprising:

a license issuance history memory unit for storing an issuance history of an electronic license;

a content provider's issuance history preparing unit which receives information to specify a content provider of digital contents and extracts an issuance history which is a history of the issuance of a license for digital contents provided by the specified content provider from the issuance histories stored in the license issuance history memory unit; and

a content provider's issuance history output unit for outputting the issuance history for the specified content provider generated in the content provider's issuance history preparing unit.

6. A license-issuing system according to Claim 2, further comprising:

license request receiving means for receiving a request for issuance of an electronic license,

wherein, in the case the license request receiving means receives a request for the issuance of an electronic license, an electronic license is generated in the license generation means, wherein the license-issuing system further comprises:

a license issuance history memory unit for storing an issuance history of an electronic license;

a requestor's issuance history preparing unit which receives information to specify a requester of the issuance of the license and extracts the specified requestor's issuance history, which is the issuance history of the electronic license requested from the specified requester, from the issuance histories stored in the license issuance history memory unit; and

a requestor's issuance history output unit for outputting the issuance history for the requester prepared in the requestor's issuance history preparing unit.

7. A license-issuing system according to Claim 2, further comprising:

a verification information issuance history memory unit for storing a history of issuance of information for verification;

a verification information issuance history preparing unit which receives information to specify a recipient of information for verification

117

and extracts the issuance history which is a history of the issuance of the information for verification issued to the specified recipient from the issuance histories stored in the verification information issuance history memory unit; and

a verification information issuance history output unit for outputting the issuance history prepared in the verification information issuance history preparing unit.

8. A license-issuing system according to Claim 2, further comprising:

public key pair preparing means for generating a public key pair; and

private key storage means for storing a private key of the public key pair prepared in the public key pair preparing means, wherein:

the information for verification is the public key prepared by the public key pair preparing means; and

the license is generated using the private key stored in the private key storage means.

9. A license intermediation method for intermediating a request for an electronic license for certifying that usage of digital contents is permitted to a specific user, the method comprising:

receiving a first license request which is a request for issuance of the electronic license for certifying that the usage of specific digital contents is permitted;

preparing a second license request for requesting the issuance of the electronic license requested in the received first license request; and

outputting the prepared second license request.

10. A license intermediation system that intermediates a request for

an electronic license for certifying that usage of digital contents is permitted to a specific user, the system comprising:

license request receiving means for receiving a first license request which is a request for the issuance of the electronic license for certifying that the usage of specific digital contents is licensed;

license request preparing means for generating a second license request for requesting the issuance of the electronic license requested in the received first license request; and

license request output means for outputting the second license request prepared in the license request preparing means.

11. A license intermediation system according to Claim 10, wherein:

information for verification required to verify legitimacy of a specific license is bound with specific digital contents; and

information to specify the information for verification is included in the first and second license requests.

12. A license intermediation system according to Claim 10, wherein:

the requested license includes a usage condition which is a condition for limiting the usage of digital contents;

usage condition preparing means for preparing the usage condition to be included in the requested license is provided; and

the usage condition prepared by the usage condition generation means is included in the second license request prepared by the license request preparing means.

13. A license intermediation system according to Claim 10, further comprising:

agreement storage means for storing an agreement for certifying that the system is permitted to intermediate the issuance of a license for specific digital contents, wherein

the agreement stored in the agreement storage means is attached to the license request prepared by license request preparing means.

14. A license intermediation system according to Claim 10, further comprising:

accounting means for charging a license issuance fee to a requester of the first license request, wherein:

when the first license request is received, the license issuance fee is charged to the requester by the accounting means.

15. A license intermediation system according to Claim 10, further comprising:

settlement means for collecting a license issuance fee from a requester of the first license request, wherein:

when the first license request is received, the license issuance fee is collected from the requester by the settlement means.

16. An agreement issuing method for allowing intermediation of a request for an electronic license for certifying that usage of digital contents is permitted to a specific user, the method comprising:

inputting information to specify an intermediator who intermediates a request for an electronic license for digital contents;

inputting information to specify the digital contents the intermediation of which is permitted to the intermediator;

generating an agreement for certifying that the intermediation of the request for the electronic license for the specified digital contents is permitted to the specified intermediator; and

120

outputting the generated agreement.

17. An agreement issuing system which issues an agreement for allowing intermediation of a request for an electronic license for certifying that usage of digital contents is permitted to a specific user, the system comprising:

agreement generating means which receives information to specify an intermediator that intermediates a request for an electronic license of digital contents and information to specify the digital contents the request for the electronic license of which the intermediator is allowed to intermediate, and generates an agreement for certifying that the specified intermediator is allowed to intermediate the request for the electronic license of the specified digital contents; and

agreement output means for outputting the agreement generated by the agreement generating means.

18. An agreement issuing system according to Claim 17, comprising:

usage condition limitation information generating means for generating usage condition limitation information which limits a range of a usage condition for limiting the usage of digital contents, wherein:

the usage condition limitation information generated by the usage condition limitation information generating means is included in the agreement generated by the agreement generating means.

19. An agreement issuing system according to Claim 17, further comprising:

an agreement issuance history memory unit for storing an issuance history of an agreement;

a history preparing unit which receives information to specify an

intermediator and extracts an issuance history for the agreement issued to the specified intermediator from the issuance histories stored in the agreement issuance history memory unit; and

a history output unit for outputting the issuance history prepared in the history preparing unit.

20. A feature providing method for providing a user one or more features, comprising:

storing information for verification to verify an electronic license for certifying that usage of all or part of features is permitted to a specific user;

inputting an electronic license;

verifying legitimacy of the input electronic license using the stored information for verification; and

activating at least part of the features only in the case it is judged that the input electronic license is legitimate.

21. A digital contents operation method, comprising:

storing information for verification to verify an electronic license for certifying that operation of digital contents is permitted to a specific user;

inputting an electronic license;

verifying legitimacy of the input electronic license using the stored information for verification; and

enabling at least part of operations of the digital contents only in the case it is judged that the input electronic license is legitimate.

22. A digital contents decrypting method for decrypting encrypted digital contents, comprising:

storing information for verification to verify an electronic license

that certifies that decrypting of encrypted digital contents is permitted to a specific user;

inputting an electronic license;

verifying legitimacy of the input electronic license using the stored information for verification; and

decrypting the encrypted digital contents only in the case it is judged that the input electronic license is legitimate.

23. A digital contents decompression method for decompressing compressed digital contents, comprising:

a step for storing information for verification to verify an electronic license that certifies that the decompression of compressed digital contents is permitted to a specific user;

a step for inputting an electronic license;

a step for verifying the legitimacy of the input electronic license using the stored information for verification; and

a step for decompressing the compressed digital contents only in the case it is judged that the input electronic license is legitimate.

24. A system that provides one or more features to a user, comprising:

verification information storage means for storing information for verification to verify an electronic license that certifies that the usage of all or a part of features of the system is permitted to a specific user; and

license verification means which receives an electronic license and verifies the legitimacy of the received electronic license using the information for verification stored in the verification information storage means, wherein:

at least the part of the features is activated only in the case it is

123

judged in the license verification means that the received electronic license is legitimate.

25. A digital contents operation system, comprising:

verification information storage means for storing information for verification to verify an electronic license that certifies that the operation of digital contents is permitted to a specific user; and

license verification means which receives an electronic license and verifies the legitimacy of the received electronic license using the information for verification stored in the verification information storage means, wherein:

at least the part of the operations of digital contents is enabled only in the case it is judged in the license verification means that the received electronic license is legitimate.

26. A digital contents operation system according to Claim 25, wherein:

the information for verification is included in digital contents; and

the information for verification is extracted from the digital contents and is stored in the verification information storage means.

27. A digital contents decrypting system for decrypting encrypted digital contents, comprising:

verification information storage means for storing information for verification to verify an electronic license that certifies that the decrypting of encrypted digital contents is permitted to a specific user; and

license verification means which receives an electronic license and verifies the legitimacy of the received electronic license using the information for verification stored in the verification information storage means, wherein:

the encrypted digital contents are decrypted only in the case it is judged in the license verification means that the received electronic license is legitimate.

28. A digital contents decrypting system according to Claim 27, wherein:

the information for verification is included in encrypted digital contents; and

the information for verification is extracted from the encrypted digital contents and is stored in the verification information storage means.

29. A digital contents decompression system for decompressing compressed digital contents, comprising:

means for receiving compressed digital contents to be decompressed;

verification information storage means for storing information for verification to verify an electronic license that certifies that decompression of digital contents is permitted to a specific user; and

license verification means which receives an electronic license and verifies legitimacy of the received electronic license using the information for verification stored in the verification information storage means, wherein:

the compressed digital contents are decompressed only in the case it is judged in the license verification means that the received electronic license is legitimate.

30. A digital contents decompression system according to Claim 29, wherein:

the information for verification is included in the compressed digital contents; and

the information for verification is extracted from the compressed

digital contents and is stored in the verification information storage means.

31. A system according to Claim 24, further comprising:

connection means for connecting to the system a portable memory

unit that stores an electronic license, wherein:

the license verification means verifies the legitimacy of the

electronic license stored in the portable memory unit connected via the

connection means.

32. A digital contents operation system according to Claim 25,

further comprising:

connection means for connecting to the system a portable memory

unit that stores an electronic license, wherein:

the license verification means verifies the legitimacy of the

electronic license stored in the portable memory unit connected via the

connection means.

33. A digital contents decrypting system according to Claim 27,

further comprising:

connection means for connecting to the system a portable memory

unit that stores an electronic license, wherein:

the license verification means verifies the legitimacy of the

electronic license stored in the portable memory unit connected via the

connection means.

34. A digital contents decompression system according to Claim 29,

further comprising:

connection means for connecting to the system a portable memory

unit that stores an electronic license, wherein:

the license verification means verifies the legitimacy of the

electronic license stored in the portable memory unit connected via the connection means.